

October 1, 2009

Economic and Allocation Advisory Committee

Submitted to: eaac@calepa.ca.gov

RE: Investment in Natural Resource Climate Adaptation in Allocation of Climate Revenue

Dear Advisory Committee Members:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge you to recommend allocating a portion of the revenue generated from AB 32, the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, to safeguard our state's natural resources from the effects of global warming.

Global warming presents the most pressing conservation challenge facing California in the twenty-first century. Even under low greenhouse gas emission scenarios, California is projected to experience reduced snowpack, increased flooding, deeper droughts, more catastrophic wildfires, and rapid sea level rise. The impacts of these changes on the state's natural resources will be devastating, from the disruption of critical foodwebs and migratory routes to inundation of wildlife-rich estuaries.

Many of these climate impacts are already generating considerable natural resource management challenges. Since 1986, longer, warmer summers in the western United States have resulted in a fourfold increase of major wildfires and a sixfold increase in the area of forest burned, compared to the period from 1970 to 1986. According to the Center for Integrative Environmental Research, fires in San Diego and San Bernardino counties in 2003 each cost over \$2 billion. Every year for the past four years, over 7 million acres of forests in the National Forest System have burned with annual suppression costs of \$1.3 billion or more. These costs are expected to grow considerably as wildfire occurrence statewide increases by as much as 37-49 percent by 2085.

As you know, curbing our greenhouse gas emissions and investing in clean, renewable energy is essential, but not adequate. We must also aggressively pursue strategies to address the effects of changing climatic conditions on our natural systems.

Investing in safeguarding our natural resources from the impacts of global warming is not only essential for the survival of many important plant and animal species; it's also good for our economy and our health. By keeping forests healthier and free from invasive species we can reduce the growing risk of catastrophic forest fires that threaten our communities. Our drinking water is kept clean by maintaining the health of our watersheds, which are increasingly strained by changing precipitation patterns. California's \$8 billion outdoor recreation industry is particularly reliant on healthy wildlife populations and habitats. For example, in 2003, outdoor recreationists spent more than \$230 million while visiting the Mojave Desert Region and visitors spent another \$145 million on trips to the three national parks in the region-Death Valley, Mojave Preserve, and Joshua Tree.

Fortunately, public agencies and not-for-profit organizations in California have already initiated innovative projects and measures to safeguard the capacity of our natural resources to provide clean water, clean air, healthy soil, and healthy environments.

- The California Natural Resources Agency recently released the draft California Climate Adaptation Strategy, which includes numerous actions to address the impacts of global warming on the state's natural resources.
- The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project near San Francisco will transform an area the size of Manhattan into a thriving wetland ecosystem. The wetlands will play a critical role in buffering surrounding urban areas from rising sea levels and flooding associated with global warming, while providing habitat for many bird, mammal, amphibian and arthropod species. Once the restoration is complete, the wetlands will act much like a giant sponge, absorbing floodwaters during storm events and protecting buildings, roads, and other infrastructure.
- Recognizing the impacts of global warming on water resources, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Sierra Meadow Restoration Business Plan aims to restore 20,000 acres of meadow habitat by 2014 for flood attenuation, late season water storage, and protection of endangered species.

However, these groundbreaking efforts are insufficiently resourced to meet the challenges ahead. On both the state and federal level we need stable and dedicated funding to ensure proper planning, implementation and management of the projects and initiatives that will help protect wildlife and their habitats from the effects of global warming.

As the Economic and Allocation Advisory Committee proposes priorities for allocation of revenues generated through California's climate program, we urge you to recommend a substantial investment in the protection and conservation of our wildlife, watersheds, rivers, and other natural resources affected by global warming. A dedicated fund for the protection of California's natural resources is critical to the survival of many important plant and animal species – including those found only in California's unique ecosystems – as well as to our public health and economic well-being.

Sincerely,

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The Nature Conservancy

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